

Abstract 322

TITLE: Evolution of Capacity-Building Initiatives to Support Peer-Led HIV Prevention Programs

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ISSUE: Schools, CBO ASOs, and other youth-serving organizations support peer education as a promising HIV prevention strategy. These programs have been successful in increasing knowledge about HIV yet many have focused on heterosexual youth and have neglected the needs of youth at high risk, including sexual minority youth. The epidemiology of HIV/AIDS required development of a new capacity building approach to increase peer education as an effective community-level HIV strategy to prevent HIV transmission among youth at high risk.

SETTING: Building on the successes of an annual statewide peer education conference and a capacity-building program supporting glbtq youth serving agencies, the 4-day Wisconsin Youth HIV Prevention Institute was attended by high-school age peer educators and program advisors from 17 peer-led HIV prevention programs in Wisconsin.

PROJECT: Based on a model of empowerment education, this training event addressed issues and barriers to effective prevention HIV education by focusing on dimensions of diversity and connections between sexism, racism, homophobia and HIV prevention. Specific objectives of the Institute were to (a) increase participants' knowledge about populations at highest risk of HIV transmission, (b) increase participants' abilities to serve as change agents among their peers and (c) increase HIV prevention programming for youth at high of HIV risk transmission, including sexual minority youth. Youth and adult delegates from 17 programs attended the training institute.

RESULTS: The Institute was successful in increasing the capacity of peer education programs to provide HIV prevention programming for youth at high-risk of HIV transmission. At 8-month follow up program changes included increases in the number of people reached by these programs, programs' effectiveness reaching youth at high risk, collaboration with other community organizations, quality of HIV prevention programming and changes in delegates' attitudes and behaviors.

LESSONS LEARNED: This capacity-building initiative highlighted the importance of requiring diversity in team composition, requiring participation by youth and program advisors, developing on-going communication and additional capacity-building initiatives to support peer-led programs.

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